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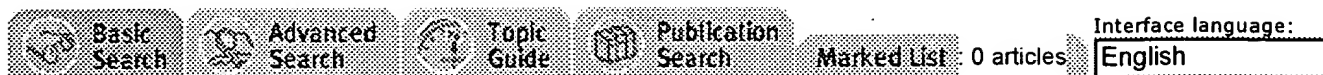
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Companies: [Long & Foster](#)  
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Mr. [Marc Fleisher] makes a living out of unusual properties. Long & Foster even has a special platoon of Realtors who focus on upper-end and one-of-a-kind homes. The Extraordinary Properties Division was established to give sellers of such homes special attention - a good idea, considering that agents stand to make tens of thousands of dollars on such sales.

Custom-built homes in particular often are designed so differently that the right buyer is tough to find. "It's hard to change a floor plan," Mr. Fleisher says. "I've seen mansions with only two or three bedrooms because [the owners] wanted them to be huge. I've seen other homes with all the kids' bedrooms on the first floor and the master suite upstairs. That may have suited your needs perfectly, but how many **buyers** are just like you?"

Visit the Web site ([www.utah-homes.com](http://www.utah-homes.com)) and search for MLS No. 2013592 to see the Millers' home in Utah, or take a virtual tour of Long & Foster's Extraordinary Properties division ([www.longandfoster.com](http://www.longandfoster.com)). [Weichert Realtors](#) ([www.weichert.com](http://www.weichert.com)) also has a department devoted to distinct homes, known as Capitals Properties & Estates.

**Full Text** (1244 words)*Copyright Washington Times Library Nov 10, 2000*

People like things that match their personalities. Have you noticed how often dogs resemble their owners? Or the way a car tells you a lot about the driver?

Homes work the same way. Every man's home is his castle, and most of us invest time and money into

personalizing our castles, making them perfect refuges from the world.

What happens when you try to sell that perfect-for-you home to another person? Will you find a buyer who appreciates your decorating tastes? Will the quirks and idiosyncrasies you find so attractive be detriments in the eye of another? It's an important question because there are some unique homes out there.

For instance, Tom and Cindy Miller moved from Alexandria to Utah three years ago. Now they are moving back to the Washington area - as soon as they can sell their home in the West.

Their custom-built home in Park City, Utah, is beautiful. It's on a 1-acre plot adjacent a golf course, near ski resorts and close to 2002 Olympic sites.

"It's not modern, but it's very contemporary," Mrs. Miller says. "It's not mountain rustic, but it's not a Cape Cod, either. I don't know what you'd call it, but it's not selling."

The Millers' home has many of the luxury features you would expect in a home listed for \$699,000. The most distinctive room in the house also is the one that could cost them a bundle.

"Tom is an editor for a high-end home-audio magazine, so we have a custom home theater that cost nearly \$100,000," Mrs. Miller says. "Everything in that room is staying, even though it's like cutting off his right arm."

Rooms like that - with projection televisions, huge leather sofas and separate rooms for the audio equipment - are more common in upper-end homes these days. Although buyers who look for such features are becoming easier to find, sellers should not expect to get a 100 percent return on their investment.

"A room like that may be a selling feature for the home in general," says Marc Fleisher of Long & Foster's Friendship Heights office, "but you won't get dollar for dollar out of the sale."

Mr. Fleisher makes a living out of unusual properties. Long & Foster even has a special platoon of Realtors who focus on upper-end and one-of-a-kind homes. The Extraordinary Properties Division was established to give sellers of such homes special attention - a good idea, considering that agents stand to make tens of thousands of dollars on such sales.

Homes in this program are marketed differently. Glossy brochures are sent to mailing lists of doctors and attorneys, ads are placed in equestrian magazines, and Extraordinary Properties magazine is mailed to 155,000 wealthy Washingtonians each quarter.

Most homeowners, of course, think their homes are extraordinary, but Mr. Fleisher is choosy about the homes he sells.

"I say 'no' more than I say 'yes' to difficult properties," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of people design and build homes that are specific to their tastes, not to the sales market. You certainly want a home that suits you, but it's smart to think about the next buyer, too."

What makes a home difficult to sell? Unusual colors are common culprits. That purple carpet might look fabulous with your modern art and red sofa, but it won't match most buyers' furnishings.

Dark grout connecting white tile was in vogue recently but has fallen out favor with many buyers. Orange may have been the perfect color for your kitchen in the 1980s, but it looks rather garish now, don't you think?

"When I first look around a home I am going to sell, I have a choice to make," Mr. Fleisher says. "If I think the uniqueness will actually sell the house, I tell [the owners] it needs proactive marketing. Together we will choose a target market and develop a plan to go after those buyers."

"But if I think their decor will have a negative effect on the sale, I politely explain that they really need to make some changes," he says.

Fortunately, carpeting and paint are relatively easy to change before you put your home on the market. If you don't know what to use to replace them, you might want to leave things as they are and offer buyers \$2,000 in decorating costs instead.

"In particular, it's the very lavish details that often backfire on you," Mr. Fleisher says. "Faux painting, gaudy finishes and unique fixtures - like the gilded gold-leaf swans I saw once - these can hinder rather than help."

Custom-built homes in particular often are designed so differently that the right buyer is tough to find. "It's hard to change a floor plan," Mr. Fleisher says. "I've seen mansions with only two or three bedrooms because [the owners] wanted them to be huge. I've seen other homes with all the kids' bedrooms on the first floor and the master suite upstairs. That may have suited your needs perfectly, but how many buyers are just like you?"

The most basic rule of real estate sales applies whether your home is plain vanilla or a 10-scoop sundae: You have to price it right. Your property will sell for whatever someone is willing to pay. How much a buyer will pay isn't totally subjective, however. Buyers and sellers both base their strategies on the sales prices of similar homes in the area, known as comparables.

Realtors and appraisers use these comparables to estimate the value of similar homes, which helps buyers and sellers understand how much they should pay or ask. An overpriced home really stands out and usually will sit on the market until the price comes down.

So how do you price your home correctly when it is so unusual that no comparables can be found? How can you know what it's worth?

Even though an experienced Realtor will be able to provide a good estimate of the property's value, it may be worth a few hundred dollars to hire an appraiser for a second opinion. Even then, it's not an exact science.

"Every property has its own features that make it different from other properties," says Jack Donnelly, a Bethesda appraiser. "Every feature has to be considered in the appraisal, which is why it takes great experience and judgment to properly evaluate a unique property."

Supply and demand have a lot to do with how your special home will fare in today's market. A home theater like the one the Millers have, for instance, would be a great selling point along the high-tech corridors of Interstate 66 or Interstate 270, where well-off executives might drool over such a playground.

But how do you know if more uncommon features, such as an indoor swimming pool or an elevator, are a plus or a minus?

"You have to understand the other homes in the area," Mr. Donnelly says.

"If none of the other properties have that feature and there is no demand for that feature, it might be a negative. You may sell the home, but you may not get the cost back."

\*\*\*\*BOX

MORE INFO:

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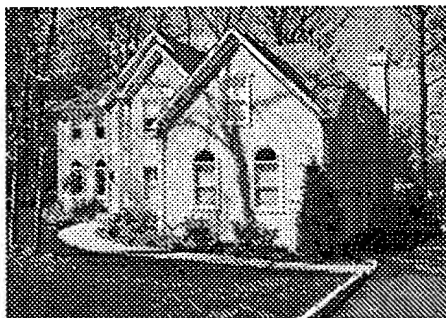
 

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## Buyer Handbook



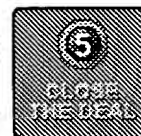
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Understand Your Purchase



Understand Your Market



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Owning a home is part of the American Dream. It means big tax breaks, a piece of land to call your own, and possibly **appreciation**. Purchasing a home is not difficult, but you will have to commit some time (maybe a lot of time, depending on your needs), energy, and money to the process. Plan to spend every weekend looking at houses or condos for a while. You will have to share your financial details to a lender to get the loan you need. You will have to part with some hard-earned cash. But, if the process seems daunting, don't despair. We've put together the tools to help you and in the end, you will have a home to call your own!

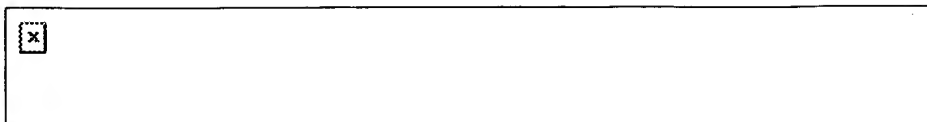
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\* If you are planning on a life event in the next couple years, such as marriage, a child or transfer with your employer, think carefully about buying. It is unusual for a house to appreciate enough in that time to recoup your costs.

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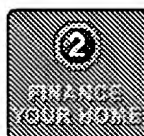
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But statistics don't tell the whole story. Drive and walk around the neighborhoods, talk to neighbors and merchants and visit the schools. To find out about future plans for the area, visit the local planning commission. Test your commute by driving or taking public transportation to and from work during rush hour.

Make a list of what is most important to you - schools, crime, proximity to work, trees, views, age of housing, etc. Assess neighborhoods with an eye toward balancing your priorities and important resale factors.

### Tips

- If you love a neighborhood, but can't afford the houses, think about a condo or townhouse in that area.
- Look for neighborhoods right on the edge of more expensive and highly sought after areas. These areas sometimes experience faster appreciation than more established neighborhoods.

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